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ABSTRACT

Replicating Success, a school improvement program in Philadelphia, is designed to raise the achievement level of all students in 30 selected, racially isolated, low achieving schools. Each school undertakes an extensive needs assessment process and then develops an individualized schoolwide plan which takes into account the characteristics of effective schools and incorporates five basic components: (1) use of Philadelphia's mandated curriculum in all curriculum areas; (2) monitoring of student performance in all curriculum areas; (3) use of a curricular component that addresses the students' self-image; (4) training of staff and administrators to support the reshaped school; and (5) training and use of parents. The most distinctive feature of the program is its focus on how the expectations of administrators, teachers, students and parents work upon one another. Other distinctive features are the program's heavy reliance on the role of the academic facilitator, and its funding basis--half private foundation, half Chapter 1. Problems encountered in implementing the program include principal resistance to the change in the principal's role from manager to instructional leader, general staff resistance to change, and the difficulties in maintaining a balance between bureaucracy, the total school, and the individual classroom. Among the lessons learned from and about the program is the fact that reasons for program effectiveness are difficult to pin down, with some participants attributing it to principals, and others to individuals, school improvement councils, monitoring, or the outside facilitator. (CG)

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# REPLICATING SUCCESS

## SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

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## INTRODUCTION

Replicating Success is a school improvement program initiated by the Philadelphia Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Constance Clayton, that is designed to raise the achievement level of all students in thirty selected racially isolated, low achieving schools. This program is a key ingredient in the new superintendent's overall plan to upgrade the educational process in Philadelphia. This overall plan includes:

1. a ringing declaration that "all children can learn, all children can achieve, and all children deserve to be educated to the maximum of their abilities;"
2. a clear statement of what children are to learn in the newly revamped standardized curriculum;
3. a system-wide testing program that matches the standardized curriculum;
4. a to-be developed computerized monitoring-reporting system;
5. a new promotion system that reflects mastery of the standardized curriculum; and
6. increased staff development opportunities.

Replicating Success rests upon three principles, indicated as key by Lezotte and Edmonds:

1. This is a long-term process;
2. This is a shared effort built on the work of teachers, administrators, parents and paraprofessionals; and
3. This is a process in which each school develops its own plan, within a common framework, based upon its particular circumstances.

This "process" approach is not understood, believed or appreciated at first by many individuals who believe and expect this to be yet another central administration pat answer.

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However, some do grasp the intent of the program as indicated by this recent statement by Merry Headman, the chairperson of the School Improvement Council at the Waring School: "For us at the Waring School, Replicating Success is not so much a program as it is a process - a process for solving our own problems. This is a new way of looking at things. We no longer wait and look to 21st Street for answers. This process lets our professionals know we respect their opinions, and that has been a motivator. Whenever a new problem arises or our plan for an old one fails, we turn to our process and look for new answers. Besides giving us a new process and a way of looking at things, Replicating Success has introduced us to Dr. Sloan and Jack Kelly, both of whom have been most helpful. We appreciate their input at all times."

While each school's plan is to be unique, each must incorporate five basic components:

1. Use of the mandated School District of Philadelphia curriculum in all curriculum areas;

2. Monitoring of student performance in all curriculum areas;

3. Utilization of an affective curricular component that addresses learner self-image in a structured fashion;

4. Training of staff and administrators to support the reshaped school;

5. A parent component, including the training and utilization of parent scholars.

Similarly, each targeted school is to develop, implement and achieve its plan utilizing the following process:

1. Carry out an extensive needs assessment process that will be jointly planned by the research and project staff, as well as the school staffs;

2. Develop individual School Improvement Councils that, with the principal, will coordinate the school's overall plan;

3. Write a long-range school plan (three years) that will take into consideration their particular needs and which will pull from existing programs needed programmatic components.

4. Draw on the services and expertise of the facilitator service support team. The academic facilitators, working in conjunction with other School District personnel, will develop training sessions that focus on high expectations, school effectiveness literature, and instructional leadership. The project staff will also be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the plan.

5. Draw on a moderate amount of additional funds over three years for materials and supplies, books, and staff development opportunities.

It is evident from the above that Replicating Success is similar to many other school improvement programs around the country: an extensive needs assessment process is followed by the development of a school-wide plan which takes into account the characteristics of effective schools.

The main focus of this paper is to highlight those aspects of the Philadelphia plan which are distinctive, to describe briefly problems encountered, and to outline our tentative learnings.

## DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Probably the most distinctive feature of Replicating Success is its heavy focus on the dynamics of the expectation effect. Project staff believe and operate on the premise that a network of expectations exists, and that the expectations interact and reinforce one another within a school setting and within a school district. This includes administrators' expectations of teachers, teachers' expectations of students and parents, parents' expectations of students, students' expectations of one another, parents' and students' expectations of teachers and administrators, and the superintendent's expectations for the schools.

In the needs assessment process the academic facilitators are constantly looking for specific behaviors, systems, and patterns which reveal the school's expectations. The question always in the forefront is, "If party 'X' truly believes all students can learn to a level of excellence/grade level, then:

1. How is the principal spending his/her time and energy?
2. What is recognized and rewarded on a regular basis in the school, other than behavior and punctuality?
3. What are the prevailing myths in this school?
4. Are there explicit standards for learning in major subject areas that students, parents and teachers know and uphold?
5. Are students promoted regularly without question?
6. Do parents understand the report card?
7. Does anyone look at indicators of student progress during the year and do anything with that information?
8. What goes on in staff meetings?
9. Does the principal have a clear vision of where the school is to go?
10. Do teacher behaviors in the classroom indicate that they expect students to learn?"

What we attempt to do, particularly in the early stages of the process, is to offer the educational community, particularly the principal and teachers, another perspective on the belief systems that seem to be operative. For example, before the needs assessment data is reviewed, the staff is asked to indicate what they would expect to see if this was an effective school with high expectations. Also, in the original interview with staff, we ask them, "Would you send your own child to this school?"

Our goal is that the expectations lens becomes one that the school community will use whenever it is looking at results and planning.

A second distinctive feature of Replicating Success is its heavy reliance on the role of the academic facilitator. This individual, generally a released teacher who has passed a special examination, becomes an integral part of the change process. He/she initially spends two days a week in the school, working extensively in helping with needs assessment, planning, and implementation.

The facilitator has to develop a relationship of trust with the principal and with the teachers and paraprofessionals. He/she comes to know the school as well as or better than any other individual and must be able to work with all parties and not become identified with any one person or group. All this occurs without any line authority or special status.

Because circumstances vary in each school, it is very difficult to describe the facilitators' role, other than to say it is to make the change process work in such a way that they can leave in 3-4 years with continuation assured.

A third distinctive feature of Replicating Success is its funding basis. Approximately half the funds come from the William Penn Foundation and half from Chapter I. The former permits a certain degree of flexibility in the project's operation. Also, there is a distinct advantage to having an outside agency review the process, ask difficult questions, and push the school system to consider difficult changes.

## PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

The intent here is to describe briefly problems which are endemic to the change process and which cut across several schools.

1. You can expect to meet considerable resistance and defensive behavior from some principals. Even though involvement in the project is voluntary, that doesn't make the change process an easy one. In many cases the project calls for a fundamental shift in the principal's role - the rules of the game have been changed.

This change from the accustomed role of principal as manager to that of instructional leader is a perilous one, involving new beliefs, behaviors and learnings. See Chart #1. Change for anyone, even under the best of circumstances, is difficult.

2. You can expect to meet skepticism, complacency, resistance and defensive behavior from the school staff. Initially, many teachers will continue to behave as though this is just another project being thrust upon them by downtown in which they have no significant role to play. They are subject to the same kinds of stress outlined above for the principals. They'd like to keep things the way they are: "Just give us good students and parents."

3. A major problem is the mobility of personnel, both within the schools and in the project. While some attempt was made in the original proposal to require teacher and principal to stay put for three years, there is no way to enforce this. Just when you get rolling, a principal retires or transfers, several key teachers are promoted or transferred, and facilitators leave to become principals.

4. There is not sufficient time for planning and staff development. Teachers and administrators put in a long, hard day and have very little time during the day to meet or energy at the end of the day to do anything. This is compounded by the teacher contract, which says no one can make any demands on rostered preparation periods.

5. There is a tendency to want to get over the needs assessment process as soon as possible. As a result, not as much mileage is gotten out of the data as is necessary and warranted. Also, there is a problem in interpreting the data, in wading through too much information, and in looking at anything that touches on one's own behavior or role.

6. It will be difficult for the facilitators not to become discouraged and frustrated. Successful teachers get a great deal of reinforcement from and satisfaction with their students. In the role of facilitators, the same individuals get

little reinforcement on site; what they often encounter is passive resistance, anger, rejection, and complaints.

7. When staffs get to the planning process, they will often by stymied by a lack of fresh ideas or programs to consider. Too many thrusts will be aimed at discipline.

8. It is difficult to maintain an effective balance between efforts directed at total school issues and practices and those directed at the individual classroom. Both are necessary. Some school improvements seem to focus heavily on the classroom; ours probably dwells too heavily on the school-wide issues.

9. While much can be done within a school, the larger school system still influences what happens. Our experience is that the bureaucracy can be inflexible and unresponsive.

10. Prior to Replicating Success, there was very little real monitoring of student progress, and attempts to get it going met with resistance from all sides. Principals are not trained or experienced in this process, and teachers see it as a threat and additional work.

LEARNINGS (AND HYPOTHESES)

Two qualifications need to be said about the items which follow. One, these are truly "tentative" learnings. The project has been operating for only a year and a half. We have just begun to work with our second cohort of ten schools. Two, given that we are a staff of a dozen people, many of whom are very individualistic, and given that we are working with twenty very different schools, it might be difficult to find any one learning that everyone would agree with.

1. Significant change in a school is possible. We have seen some fairly dramatic turn-arounds. However, it would be difficult to point to any one or two factors that accounted for these changes. Finding the key can be the facilitator's major problem.

2. Some of us believe the principal is the key for turning a school around. Their change in behavior and/or attitude seems to be able to reach the most people most quickly. Without their direction and/or support, this group feels change will either be inconsequential or of short duration.

3. I personally have come to believe that the principal's "compelling vision" (to use Warren Bennis' term) is the key factor of leadership. Bennis says "vision refers to the capacity to create and communicate a view of a desired state of affairs that induces commitment among those working in the organization." The great majority of our schools lacked this.

4. Others in our group believe that at some sites a key teacher or group of teachers has been the pivotal factor in bringing about significant changes. They point to situations where influential teachers, given the opportunity, have been able to provide the leadership necessary for positive movement.

5. It is extremely helpful to have some form of school improvement council that represents all parties in the school community. Even though the principal always has the final word in our project, our experience is that this body is necessary to enlist the great majority of teachers in the new direction. An independent knowledgeable observer of our project who interviewed teachers on site felt that the program has succeeded in "empowering" teachers.

6. Many of us agree with Edmonds, who said that monitoring was the component of effective schools that tended to drive all the others. When indicators of student progress are collected and analyzed, and then reviewed in a supportive way with the individual teachers, progress seems to occur. This process is also one of the most difficult to get everyone to engage in.

7. Most of us believe that the role of the facilitator is a must. There needs to be that outside, knowledgeable, pushy, supportive character who provides the additional perspective and drive. This means being in the school at least one day a week for several years.

8. We have found it very helpful for the facilitators to receive training and support from organizational development people, even though their field is the business world.

9. The facilitators believe that the most important element in the needs assessment process is the initial individual interview with every member of the staff. This interview provides their personal connection to the staff and gives them an excellent overview of the school organization and climate. This is a lengthy affair, but a necessary one.

10. We have found that each school has a prevailing myth which must be addressed if turn-around is to occur. An example of such a myth is: "Parents in this community want a warm, protective environment in elementary school, do not see the need for a high school education, and hope their kids live next door and work in the local factory." Another might be: "Hispanic children cannot do very well because of the language problem, because their parents do not value education, and because they move back and forth to Puerto Rico." Lezotte's concept of the "disaggregate analysis" (research to check the accuracy of crucial beliefs) has been a useful one in examining these myths.

11. We have found that you can count on almost every staff saying in the needs assessment process that they are a good staff, but change will not occur because the children are not disciplined, parents are not involved, the principal is not effective, and there are not enough supplies. Even though we might not agree with their assessment, we have found it necessary to deal with each of these items. What we do not do is allow the process to dwell on any one of these.

12. Even though we say the staff is to come up with their own plans, we have found it necessary to provide them with alternatives and to personally encourage teachers and principals to become involved in certain staff development projects. For example, eight of the first ten schools became involved in the school district's mastery learning project.

13. We have also found it helpful in establishing our legitimacy in the school to help them get something tangible for the school that they have been complaining about (100 reams of paper or repairs to a gym floor or delivery of science materials).

14. Similarly, we have found it useful to get short-term projects going right away, especially those with a high probability of visible success. This helps the staff feel "they can do."

15. Desite the conflicting reports in the literature on promotional policies, most of us believe these schools have suffered from a lack of promotional standards. We encourage them to establish standards and let the students and parents know about these at every opportunity.

16. All of our school improvement councils are chaired or co-chaired by teachers and not the principal. We have found this effective. Most of our schools have had difficulty in getting parent/community participation on the council.

17. Principals and teachers involved in the process require a healthy balance of the carrot and the stick. We provide support for the principals and council chairpersons through monthly support group sessions and personal contact. We encourage regular recognition of teachers' contributions and successes. At the same time, we feel it is necessary to have the district superintendents' support in monitoring the progress of the project in each school.

18. Finally, we have found it useful for the project staff to organize project-wide programs that pull the schools together around a central theme. For example, Dr. William Purkey spoke to folks on a Saturday morning about "Inviting School Success" and this was followed by practical make it/take it workshops.

## CONCLUSION

Much has been written in recent years about the characteristics of effective schools. Replicating Success is engaged in the very difficult process of trying

to help schools in the inner city become effective schools. This is a challenge that is just beginning, but as long as we know that the students are capable of achieving, we can be satisfied with nothing less.

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CHART #1

| PRINCIPAL'S ROLE | ASSUMPTIONS | CHARACTERISTICS |
|---|---|---|
| Principal's role as manager<br><br>(Loosely coupled) | 1. The home and socio-economic status of the family are primary determinants of student achievement.<br><br>2. Classrooms are relatively autonomous.<br><br>3. The school's job is to sort children out. IQ is fixed: the bell-shaped curve of achievement is correct. | The goal is to have a smoothly running operation.<br><br>Don't rock the boat "downtown."<br><br>Paperwork must be in on time.<br><br>Make as few complaints as possible.<br><br>Find a few children who are shining lights.<br><br>Educational equality means equality of opportunity.<br><br>Plans are submitted and filed. |
| Principal's role as instructional leader<br><br>(More tightly coupled) | 1. The school and the classroom can make a significant difference independent of the socio-economic status of the student's family.<br><br>2. The school is a total, complex organization: a social system with a network of expectations.<br><br>3. All children can learn. IQ is not important (except at the extreme ends of the continuum) and not fixed. Focus on variables you can do something about. | Assume responsibility.<br><br>Provide the overall goal, vision, and mission of of the school.<br><br>Set priorities within this framework.<br><br>Find ways to get the staff to buy into and own the vision.<br><br>Outcome based: educational equality means equality of achievement.<br><br>Results, not just effort, are important. |